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Trump Immigration Policies Increase Peril For International Students

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Signage on the Tufts University Campus on March 27, 2025, in Somerville, Massachusetts. Graduate ... **More**
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International students face increasing peril under Trump administration policies targeting the protests, articles and social media posts of visa holders. Immigration enforcement authorities have arrested protest participants and op-ed writers, and the State Department has canceled hundreds of student visas and told individuals to self-

deport or face the consequences. While government officials say they are enforcing the president's executive orders, attorneys argue that the administration's actions are unconstitutional. Education organizations expect the Trump administration's actions will discourage international students from coming to the United States.

Immigration Authorities Nabbing Students Off The Street And Canceling Visas

On March 27, 2025, "Secretary of State Marco Rubio estimated that he had signed perhaps more than 300 letters revoking the visas of students, visitors and others to force their expulsion from the United States because of their foreign policy views or criminal activities," reported the [New York Times](#).

On March 8, 2025, Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested Mahmoud Khalil, a lawful permanent resident and pro-Palestinian protester who graduated in December from Columbia University. The Trump administration used an immigration law provision that allows for deportation if the Secretary of State believes an alien's presence or activities "would have potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences for the United States." As a federal judge, [Donald Trump's sister](#), Maryanne Trump Barry, ruled that provision unconstitutional for its vagueness, lack of due process and a delegation of authority from Congress to the executive branch that gives the Secretary of State limitless authority. A higher court overturned her opinion on unrelated technical grounds.

On March 25, 2025, in a [video](#) that captured significant attention, masked ICE agents arrested Tufts University Ph.D. student Rumeysa Ozturk and sent her to a detention facility in Louisiana. The State Department confirmed that her participation in a joint op-ed criticizing Tufts and Israel played a role in her arrest and potential deportation. "An op-ed by a group of students published in the open daylight of a free press should not be a factor in anyone's arrest," wrote *Washington Post* columnist Kathleen Parker. In the majority opinion in *Bridges v. Wixon* (1945), Justice William O. Douglas declared, "Freedom of speech and of the press is accorded aliens residing in this country."

If someone had not seen the arrest and recorded a video, it is possible that the student would have just “disappeared” by moving to detention in another state with no record in the ICE online detention locator, according to former Cornell Law Professor Stephen Yale-Loehr and Jonathan Grode of Green & Spiegel.

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Yale-Loehr and Grode see three problems that threaten the ability of international students to remain in the United States. First, the State Department is canceling visas due to an exercise of free speech that administration officials find objectionable. Second, ICE denies due process since students cannot respond to charges. Third, student SEVIS records are terminated for “failure to maintain status” because the State Department revokes a visa and makes them subject to removal. (SEVIS, headquartered with ICE, is used to maintain information on international students.)

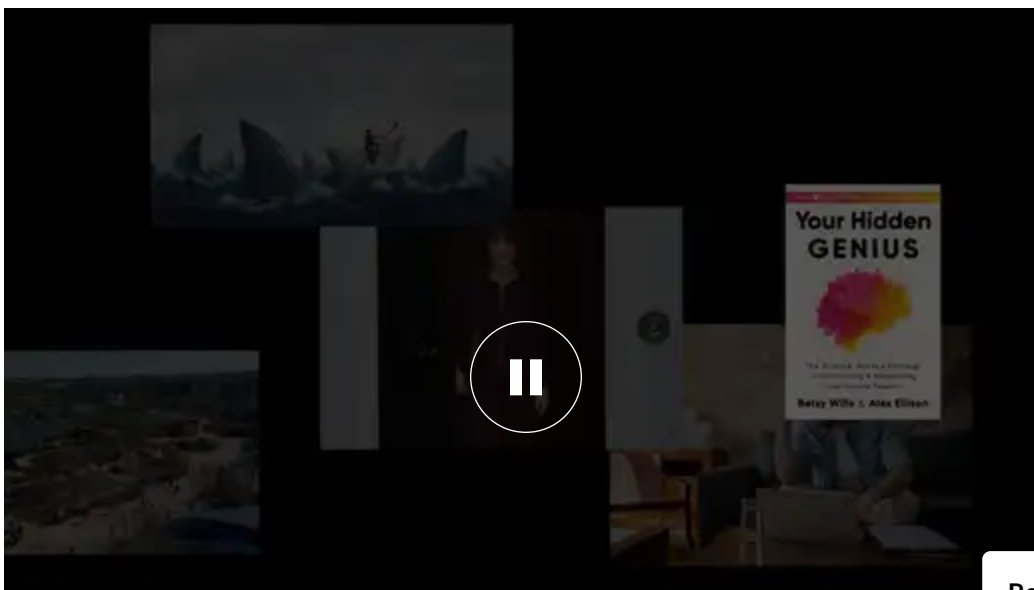
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“Three university officials, who were given anonymity so they could speak freely, across the country report that, in recent days, student residency statuses in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System . . . are being changed without their knowledge,” reported [Zeteo](#).

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Attorneys believe the State Department is identifying students, possibly using AI (as reported by [Axios](#)), revoking passport visa travel stamps and turning to ICE to terminate the student visa record and potentially detain a student. “Given how minor the issues are for most of the 300 students affected so far, such as writing an op-ed or a speeding ticket, a university cannot give any kind of certainty to students,” said Grode. “Anyone could be at risk. Some universities are checking on visa revocations hourly and being on call to share SEVIS termination with the student quickly.”

“Even if the visa is revoked and the F-1 status has been terminated in SEVIS, a foreign student can still continue to study and, if placed in deportation proceedings, should challenge the deportation before an immigration judge,” said immigration attorney Cyrus Mehta. “If removal proceedings have not commenced, I think a student can also challenge the notice that they have been terminated in SEVIS in federal district court through the Administrative Procedure Act on the grounds that the action was arbitrary, capricious and the student was not given any warning or notice to respond.”

Mehta believes a student could also challenge an action on First Amendment grounds. “If the student is placed in removal, then too can a student challenge on First Amendment grounds, but the student may need to do this at the Court of Appeals stage since an immigration judge and the Board of Immigration Appeals may rubber stamp Rubio’s determination,” he said. According to the *Matter of Ruiz-Massieu*, decided as

amended June 10, 1999, in the U.S. Department of Justice Executive Office for Immigration Review Board of Immigration Appeals, a letter from the Secretary of State is sufficient evidence of deportability under the foreign policy provision. “If a student is detained upon being placed in removal, the student can challenge the detention in federal court through a habeas petition and could also seek a bond hearing before an immigration judge,” added Mehta.

Lubna Kably of *The Times of India* reported that hundreds of international students have received emails from the State Department warning them to self-deport or face arrest and deportation. “The crackdown is based on social-media reviews being conducted by DOS (which includes Consulate officials). Thus, even new student applications . . . will also come under such social media scrutiny.” Kably reports that some students have received the emails “for something as innocuous as sharing a social media post.”



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Impact Of Immigration Policies On Where International Students Choose To Study

Education organizations are alarmed by the Trump administration's actions and are concerned about their impact on international students' decisions on where to attend school. International students represent between 50% and 70% of full-time graduate students in key technical fields at U.S. universities and are a significant source of high-skilled talent for employers. They also provide revenue that subsidizes U.S. student tuition at many colleges and universities and, supporters say, help establish economic, political and other connections between Americans and individuals from different backgrounds.

"International students and their families seek predictability, security, and a welcoming environment when choosing where to study," said Fanta Aw, executive director and CEO of NAFSA: Association of International Educators. "Given recent actions by the government related to visa revocation, termination of status, and detentions of some international students, they are deeply fearful and understandably concerned about their safety and future in the United States."

Aw believes losing international student contributions will negatively impact U.S. engagement with the world and its economic strength, national security and global competitiveness. She notes, "Students have many choices when it comes to study destination. This is likely to result in prospective students choosing to study elsewhere."

Miriam Feldblum, executive director of the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, shares Aw's concerns. "It is deeply disturbing to see these immigration enforcement actions targeting international students and other noncitizen campus members that appear to lack clear cause, violate their Fifth Amendment protections, including due process and legal representation, and for at least a number of them, be based on speech or associations that are protected by the First Amendment," she said. A forthcoming "[travel ban](#)" could also block visas for international students from individual countries.

"These and other actions we are seeing will no doubt lead to a decline in America's reputation as the premier destination of choice for global talent from around the world, and a decline in new international student enrollments," said Feldblum. "Their loss will really be our loss. We will lose a generation of talented students and scholars."

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